

Town's education system has history of achievement

By Donna MacLearn
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DUXBURY — The town's commitment to public education began more than 300 years ago.

"As early as 1683, the sum of eight pounds was granted to the Duxbury school, which was kept by Rev. Ichabod Wiswall, who had settled as pastor of the First Parish in 1676," School Superintendent Donald Kennedy said.

Kennedy, a former history teacher, scoured old town reports, school committee minutes, and books in doing research on Duxbury's schools for the town's 350th anniversary.

He found that the first town schoolhouse was built in 1715 at the corner of Harrison and Tremont streets. By 1735, the town had voted to create four school districts covering the neighborhoods known today as Powder Point, Tremont and Harrison streets, North Duxbury, and Captain's Hill.

During the next century, there were 12 neighborhood school districts: Washington Street, Standish Shore, Island Creek, Tobey Garden Street (Tree of Knowledge), Ashdod, Alden, Millbrook, Powder Point, Tremont, Crooked Lane, Surplus Street, and High Street, he said.

What is believed to be the first student government in America was founded in 1840 at the Point School at Powder Point and King Caesar roads. Students "made all the rules," Kennedy said.

In 1844, the private, co-educational Partridge Academy opened for high school students on the site now occupied by the town offices.

Mary A. Livermore, a teacher who prepared students for the academy's first class, later recalled in her autobiography, "All the young people in my charge belonged to good families, had been well-trained, and possessed that

polish and refinement of manner that comes from travel and association with intelligent and cultivated people.

"Most of them were the children of shipmasters, whose wives frequently accompanied their husbands on voyages, and some of my pupils had been born on the ocean or in foreign ports."

Kennedy found that pranks abounded in Duxbury's 19th-century schools.

For example, school committee minutes from 1879 state: "The school committee voted to write to Mr. Marsh in regard to his son requesting him to pay the expenses attending the finding of the bell stolen from school house No. 2 (Standish Shore) in the possession of his son and if paid would prevent it coming before the town."

In minutes from 1866, the committee states: "Complaint was made to the general school committee by Gershom Bradford and Daniel A. Glass that there was a good deal of disorder in their school in district No. 3 (Island Creek) such as getting out of the windows, breaking the glass and the benches and tearing off the corner boards of the schoolhouse . . . and that the teacher seemed to have no control of the scholars, and that their school money was thrown away."

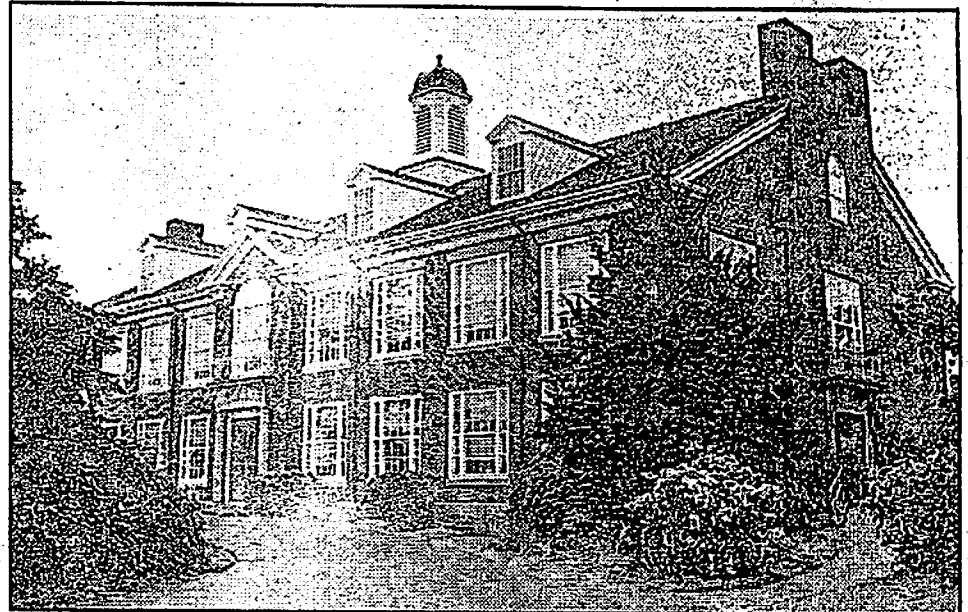
When high costs thwarted Duxbury's efforts to organize its own public high school, the town negotiated in 1868 to send its students to Partridge Academy for an annual fee of \$150 per student, Kennedy said.

The town's first school superintendent, Dr. E.H. Watson, was hired in 1890 for an annual salary of \$260. He served Scituate and Marshfield at the same time.

A private school for boys, the Powder Point School, operated from 1866 to 1926. It was east of the King Caesar House.

A new public high school, now the upper Alden Elementary School, opened in Septem-

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The Alden School, now used for elementary pupils, was a high school when it opened in 1927.

ber 1927 with 203 students in grades 5 through 12, Kennedy said.

The lower Alden Elementary School was built in 1949; the intermediate school in 1961; the high school in 1968; and the Chandler Elementary School in 1973.

Jack Hill says the ability of Duxbury students has remained constant during his 19 years as principal of the high school. Each year, 75 to 80 percent of the graduates go on to college.

"They have always been high achievers. The kids are not extraordinary. Their tests show they are a little above average," he said.

"But they tend to achieve a lot, not just academically, but also in music, in athletics and in drama. The kids just seem to do well."

Hill thinks their achievement reflects the town's character. "The school is a servant of the society it lives in. We have parents who

send their kids to school who generally are ready to learn."

School problems have changed over the years as society has changed, Hill said.

When he arrived in 1968, Vietnam-era students were rejecting authority and questioning everything.

While today's students are quieter and question less, "they are more purposeful than they were 10 years ago," Hill said.

Students in the lower grades have participated in 350th anniversary activities this year. Elementary school homerooms made cloth banners for use during festivities along the waterfront this weekend.

With the help of professional artists, Alden students created an environmental sculpture, Chandler students painted a mural, and intermediate school students created a macrame of ship rigging.